Synopsis of Part Two

Concurrent Session at CCHL National Conference, June 2024
Co-facilitated by Steve Kovacic and Brenda Lammi

Panel Dialogue

Engaging and Supporting the Health Workforce

Question to panel: How are healthcare organizations engaging, supporting, and retaining their workforce?

Mike Nader, President and CEO of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority began the dialogue by focussing on the engaging and the supporting, because with these the retention will follow. Nader stated that during the pandemic, senior leaders were notably absent, leading to a lack of visible executive leadership. Efforts have been since made to improve visibility and engagement with staff through small but significant actions. These included the leadership team distributing ice cream to staff, and while doing so, engaging in meaningful dialogue. The leadership team is also holding open office hours, organizing "Ask Me Anything" AMA sessions, and establishing daily huddles on every unit to address staff issues in real-time. Additionally, the CEO made it a point to visit each separate site. Despite these efforts, there were challenges, including high work-safe injury rates, with 500 full-time equivalents off due to physical and psychological injuries. A new safety association was introduced to address and reduce workplace injuries. Another significant challenge was the loss of many mid-level leaders, which resulted in a loss of institutional knowledge, making it difficult for new managers to learn from experienced ones, emphasizing the need to focus on and support mid-level leaders.

In response to the significant wave of people leaving healthcare, Kathy MacNeil added, a strategic team was established in 2022 to address this challenge at the Vancouver Island Health Authority. This team engaged extensively with staff through numerous polls, town halls, and Q&A sessions. They identified key focus areas including training and development, good leadership, flexibility, childcare, and housing impacts. Mid-level leaders were recognized as crucial for frontline support, leading to the development of a new leader program. Additionally, service awards were created in collaboration with the foundation to promote peer recognition, ensuring staff feel seen and heard. Safety has also been prioritized, with a concerted effort to acknowledge workplace risks and promote cultural safety. This topic is now a regular feature on the executive team's agenda and is discussed in town halls to highlight ongoing safety measures and identify needed supports.

Kelly Kimens shared that at the William Osler Health System, staff are encouraged to share their problems with the leadership team who then actively address these issues. To shape a culture, the organization leverages data from engagement surveys, exit interviews, and new employee feedback to understand the employee life cycle and shares this information broadly. Leaders act as champions, aiding in testing various initiatives. The engagement and wellness strategy is built on the concept of "I, we, and you," prompting reflection on personal actions ("I"), collective actions ("we"), and organizational actions ("you"), fostering shared ownership and accountability.

A common theme throughout all the statements is the focus on engagement and support of staff to improve retention and organizational culture. This involves increasing leadership visibility, fostering open communication, addressing staff issues in real-time, recognizing and supporting mid-level leaders, prioritizing safety, and promoting shared ownership and accountability through structured engagement strategies.

Impact of Efforts to Retain the Health Workforce

Question to Panel: How do they know that the leadership efforts are closing the loop and that they are moving the dot with all those great strategies that they're putting in place from an employee perspective?

Kimens identified two sources of information in assessing whether their engagement and support strategies are working. The first is if the data and results are shifting on the areas of focus, the second is with walkabouts, which help determine if staff is engaged or disengaged, and that helps us focus our attention on where we need to. This data is shared with employees.

MacNeil emphasized that measuring impact hinges on effective communication. At Vancouver Island Health Authority, frontline staff are pivotal sources of information, contributing through employee and pulse surveys to monitor specific areas. The leadership team conducts walkabouts, asking questions like, "How many new members are on your team?" and "How do you engage them?" Recognizing the challenges of communication, they continuously develop new mechanisms to ensure a two-way flow of information.

The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority uses pulse surveys and quick access surveys, enabling staff to use QR codes to provide feedback in real time, reported Nader. Allowing them to monitor the organization's status continuously. Leadership is encouraged to shadow workers, walking in their shoes to hear directly from front-line staff. Additionally, they have a 'Talk to Mike Nader' email account, which initially received mostly negative feedback but has seen a decline in negativity over time. Accountability for senior leadership is tied to the strategic plan, with a strong emphasis on communication at all levels.

Gen Z in the Workforce

Presentation Synopsis

Kovacic provided a short presentation on the profile and expectations of Gen Z in the workplace.

By 2025, Gen Z is projected to constitute 27% of the workforce. Within five years after college, many in this generation aspire to be climbing the career ladder or managing employees. They anticipate working with an average of four organizations throughout their careers, reflecting a tendency toward mobility and varied experiences. Moreover, 30% of Gen Z are willing to accept a pay cut to engage in work they find meaningful, underscoring their desire for purpose over profit.

When it comes to job search priorities, Gen Z places a high value on growth opportunities, generous pay, making a positive impact, job security, comprehensive benefits, flexible hours,

and having a manager who can offer mentorship. These priorities reflect a balanced approach to career planning, emphasizing both personal and professional development. Their attitudes towards co-workers reveal some generational discrepancies: 52% of Gen Z believe they will work well with Gen X, while only 27% feel the same about working with baby boomers, indicating potential challenges in intergenerational workplace dynamics.

Gen Z values specific qualities in managers, including honesty, integrity, and the ability to mentor, which aligns with their broader expectations of transparency and ethical leadership. Born between 1997 and 2012, Gen Z are digital natives, highly tech-savvy, and they place a strong emphasis on diversity, inclusion, and flexibility. In the healthcare sector, they are particularly adept at adopting new technologies such as electronic health records and artificial intelligence. Their proficiency with technology positions them as key players in the modernization of healthcare systems.

Despite their technological affinity, there's a concern about whether Gen Z is inclined to pursue careers in healthcare, especially in the post-pandemic context which has seen a decline in interest. This challenge necessitates a proactive approach to creating an inviting and encouraging environment for Gen Z in healthcare workplaces. They are looking for continuous learning and development opportunities, a collaborative work environment, clear and transparent communication from leaders, achievable goals, meaningful work, social impact, a sense of purpose, corporate social responsibility, work-life balance, wellness programs, flexibility, and mental health days.

Gen Z's strengths include their adaptability, resilience, ability to multitask, and digital proficiency. However, they face challenges such as the need for effective mentors and a desire for a balanced work-life. Addressing these needs will be crucial in retaining Gen Z talent. As the Alpha generation follows, focusing on micro-credentialing, micro-learning, and accelerated education will be essential to meet the evolving demands of the workplace and ensure that future generations are well-prepared for their roles.

Panel Dialogue

Question to Panel: What is your organization doing right now in preparing for the next group of leaders in our organization, the Gen Z's?

William Osler Health System, reported Kimens, is shifting their focus from traditional learning management system-based training to experiential learning, providing mentorship and professional development through hands-on, side-by-side learning with continuous feedback. This approach aligns with what Gen Z employees are seeking: direct experience and real-time guidance. The two main priorities are mentorship and development, emphasizing the individual's impact within the broader system, so that personal successes contribute to organizational success. However, they face challenges in addressing work-life balance due to systemic issues like scheduling and the preference to avoid 12-hour shifts, a problem they have yet to solve but hope to find solutions for with collaborative input.

Flexibility has emerged as the top priority for the workforce, MacNeil indicated, presenting a significant challenge in finding systematized solutions at the Vancouver Island Health Authority. This challenge also presents an opportunity to leverage the strengths of Gen Z,

especially as they implement electronic health records, by involving the Gen Z team members as teachers and mentors. In areas where the newer team members lack expertise, Vancouver Island Health Authority provides mentors and mentorship. Their Employee Student Nurses program integrates second-year nursing students into the workforce, easing their transition and familiarizing them with the organizational culture. Additionally, their Earn and Learn Programs support community residents in healthcare training by covering tuition and providing employment, ensuring a local pipeline of talent. Recognizing that employees may only commit for limited periods, they aim to engage them effectively during their tenure.

Nader shared that he thinks it is possible that the desires of Gen Z are not entirely new, but rather reflect what previous generations wanted at their age but did not feel empowered to express. Starting their careers, Gen Z emphasizes work-life balance, avoiding long hours, and evolving their priorities as they grow, similar to how earlier generations' priorities shifted with life changes like starting a family. Therefore, flexibility should be tailored to individuals' life stages rather than categorizing them strictly by generation. High-functioning teams leverage the diverse skills and perspectives of all members, with Gen Z bringing rapid access to new knowledge and technological proficiency, while Gen X and Boomers contribute valuable experience and insights, preventing the repetition of past mistakes.

Leaders as Mentors

Question to Panel: How they would prepare their teams to mentor the new demographic?

The biggest challenge for health system leaders is constantly managing crises, leaving little time for reflection and strategic thinking, shared Nader. To prepare leaders effectively, they need permission and time to pause, reflect, and engage with their teams to understand their needs. Without this, leaders can only address immediate issues rather than building for the future. Creating opportunities for mentorship, coaching, and guidance is essential for developing the next generation of leaders.

MacNeil shared the quote, "leadership is about planting trees under whose shade you'll never sit" - emphasizing that leadership involves planning for the future, often beyond our own tenure, emphasizing the importance of taking a long-term perspective. Leaders should remain humble, curious, and open to learning, especially from newcomers, rather than assuming they have all the answers. Incorporating planetary health and climate change into strategic plans is crucial, and leaders should enable contributions to these strategies from all team members.

Our focus has been on encouraging leaders to be curious and not feel pressured to have all the answers, Kimens added. At the William Osler Health System, they emphasize the importance of meaningful interactions and engagement on the unit, as these moments matter most. Despite having various programs and processes, they must translate into real, lived experiences for Gen Z employees; otherwise, they will leave.

The dialogue was wrapped up by Kovacic, who summarized that at the Good Samaritans, they frequently discuss the importance of engagement and believe the principle "nothing about them without them," used with patients and residents, should also apply to their employees. This means involving employees in conversations about the future to ensure they are prepared to better serve our patients and residents.

Healthcare Excellence Canada Presentation

Jan Byrd presented on the work being done by HEC to address the health workforce challenges.

1. Health Workforce Innovation Challenge

The Health Workforce Innovation Challenge was created to inspire healthcare leaders and teams to develop innovative ideas and solutions to support and retain the current workforce. Recognizing the intertwined nature of patient safety and workforce safety, the challenge aimed to address fundamental issues impacting healthcare delivery. The Canadian Institute of Health Information's 2022-2023 data revealed that 1 in 17 hospital stays in Canada involved unintended harm and highlighted a correlation between workforce issues (such as sick time, overtime, and purchased hours) and hospital harm rates.

This initiative saw high engagement across Canada. HEC invited publicly funded teams to experiment with new care models to improve workloads, job satisfaction, inclusion, cultural safety, wellness, and resiliency. With 148 registered teams, $700,000 in grants were awarded to support these innovative efforts, emphasizing the importance of senior leadership engagement.

The challenge has reached over 20,000 healthcare workers, encouraging them to find joy in their work and support the health workforce.

2. Health Workforce Retention Objectives

In 2023, an assessment of over 40 reports and 110 recommendations led to six key objectives for health workforce retention:

- fostering physically safe work environments,
- enhancing sustainable staffing models,
- building flexible work structures,
- providing equitable and appropriate compensation,
- ensuring supportive and inclusive workplaces, and
- supporting career advancement.

3. Policy Guidance: Retaining Internationally Educated Healthcare Workers

In partnership with the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness and the Nova Scotia Health Authority, HEC was to conduct a policy lab in January 2024, exploring factors that support the retention of internationally educated healthcare workers. The policy lab event convened diverse perspectives, including IEHW regulators, patient partners, and policymakers using facilitated methods to develop co-designed policy considerations.

The policy lab approach uses research, evidence, and lived experiences to understand policy issues, in this case, to explore factors influencing successful retention of IEHW. By focusing on an Atlantic perspective, the lab addressed shared issues and enabling factors among policymakers. The elements of education, regulatory and policy approaches, current workforce practices, promising practices, resources, and the needs of workers and their families were

examined to create policy considerations relevant for policymakers and organizations across Canada.

Ethical recruitment and retention practices were also discussed, recognizing the topic's nuances. The goal was to identify priorities and perspectives from various organizations and individuals, facilitate conversations to find common ground, and develop actionable policy considerations. Key elements include the importance of including internationally trained healthcare workers in policy discussions, clarifying licensure pathways and accreditation practices, and maintaining patient safety emerged as top considerations for successful retention.

Furthermore, there is a need to address the holistic needs of these health professionals and their families, including housing, childcare, and community support. Supporting IEHW in their communities, including contexts for northern, rural, and remote areas is part of successful integration. The policy lab aims publish policy considerations by July 31, 2024.

4. Policy Discussion: Examining Health Systems Impacts and Policy Options Related to Use of Agency Staff

HEC is engaging with governments, health system leaders, unions, regulatory bodies, national and provincial associations, health professionals, and patient partners to understand factors driving, and impacts related to use of staffing agencies across many regions. HEC does not advocate for any specific policy but invited dialogue to consider policy questions related to reliance on agencies, the motivations for staff choosing agency work, and how to optimize the use of staffing agencies, especially in remote areas where they have traditionally been important. The pandemic has increased reliance on these agencies, sometimes at high costs to jurisdictions, due to their role in maintaining services, providing essential staffing support, plus allowing permanent staff to take vacations. The goal is to test a framework that considers value, quality and safety, and recruitment and retention and share policy considerations, acknowledging jurisdictions are working on many other short-, medium-, and long-term strategies to address HHR challenges.